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PRESS RELEASE

USAID, DepEd Sign Agreement to Improve Access to and Quality of Education in Muslim Mindanao

(MANILA, July 29, 2005) The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of Education (DepEd) signed today a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for a five-year education program to improve access to quality basic education in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and other conflict and poverty-affected areas of Mindanao. The agreement sets forth the roles that both parties will play in implementing USAID's Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS) project. The agreement was signed at DepED by Undersecretary and Officer-in-Charge Ramon Bacani and USAID Philippines Acting Mission Director Francis Donovan.

A unique feature of the EQuALLS project is its partnership not only with the DepED and the ARMM Regional Government, but also with the U.S. Peace Corps, and a number of public/private alliances led by the following organizations: the International Youth Foundation; Save the Children-Philippines; the Knowledge Channel Foundation; Synergeia Foundation; Real World Productions; and Brother's Brother Foundation. The firm helping USAID in coordinating the project is Creative Associates International.

Through EQuALLS, USAID assistance is focused on building foundation skills of young students, especially in Grades 1-3; acquiring and distributing supplementary educational resources; and improving pre-service and in-service training of teachers to improve the quality of teaching. To respond to the needs of the sizable and growing number of out-of-school and unemployed youth, the project is also strengthening and expanding the non-formal Alternative Learning System (ALS) and provides livelihood training and links to employment opportunities for these disadvantaged youth. EQuALLS also assists *madaris* (Muslim religious schools) that are interested in adopting the Department of Education's standard curriculum for private madaris, which introduces instruction of science, math, English and Pilipino. The project also promotes the development of new models of distance education through radio and TV, as well as encouraging education reform and building the capacity for implementation.

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